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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP, EAP/CM
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TAGS: PGOV PREL PINR CH HK
SUBJECT: PRC NPC CHAIRMAN WU BANGGUO'S LOW-KEY VISIT TO
HONG KONG

REF: HONG KONG 2693

Classified By: E/P Section Chief Laurent Charbonnet; Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

¶1. (C) Summary: PRC National People's Congress (NPC) Chairman Wu Bangguo visited Hong Kong December 2-4 to preside at the opening ceremony of the International Telecommunications Union's "ITU Telecom World 2006" and meet with Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Chief Executive Donald Tsang, Macau Chief Executive Edmund Ho, Hong Kong-based central government officials and local NPC delegates. Aside from the ITU event, at which Wu delivered a bland speech focused on the development of the information and telecommunications industries in the PRC and Hong Kong, the general purpose of the visit was to "promote harmony and development" and demonstrate that the central government cared about Hong Kong. Several Consulate contacts agreed with press reports that the visit was not related to the upcoming December 10 Chief Executive Election Committee election. PRC officials reportedly canceled several planned public activities that could have resulted in embarrassing protests against the central government. End Summary.

Visit Not Related to Election

¶2. (C) Commentators from various sides of the political spectrum agreed that the timing of Wu's visit, just one week before the December 10 election to select the 800 members of the Chief Executive Election Committee (septels), was almost purely coincidental. According to the press, Wu's only election-related comments were that Hong Kong should hold a smooth election and that HKSARG officials should "accurately gauge the pulse of the masses." Local NPC Deputy and Liberal Party founder Allen Lee told us that while the central government certainly "cared about" the election, the message of Wu's visit was "more symbolic than real" and was intended to show the people of Hong Kong that Beijing supported and cared about the development of Hong Kong. Furthermore, Lee -- who said he had not participated in any of the closed-door meetings -- observed that none of the central government's senior leaders had visited Hong Kong recently, so the ITU opening presented a useful opportunity. (Note: Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) Chairman Jia Qinglin, who ranks fourth in the PRC Politburo, visited Hong Kong June 27-29, 2006; see ref). Finally, Lee said he was "amazed" at how little attention the people of Hong Kong paid to the visit by Wu, who in protocol terms is the second-ranking official in the PRC.

¶3. (C) Similarly, Secretary General Joseph Cheng of the pro-democracy Civic Party told us that Wu had traveled to Hong Kong primarily to officiate at the ITU opening. While

Cheng described the visit as "very low-key," he noted the contrast between Wu's strong endorsement of Macau Chief Executive Edmund Ho and his "avoidance of a full endorsement" of Donald Tsang. (Note: Several Hong Kong newspapers, both pro- and anti-PRC, also commented on this apparent discrepancy.) Finally, Cheng told us that Wu certainly would have reserved his "more significant comments" for the closed-door meetings with CE Tsang and other high-ranking officials.

Protests

¶4. (SBU) A variety of groups including The Frontier, the League of Social Democrats, the Justice and Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese, the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements in China, Falun Gong, and parents of right of abode seekers, organized protests outside the site of the HKSARG's welcoming banquet for Wu on December 2. Their demands included release of imprisoned journalist Ching Cheong, universal suffrage in Hong Kong, abode rights, and religious freedom in China. Prominent dissident "Long Hair" Leung Kwok-hung, who as a member of the Hong Kong Legislative Council (Legco) received an invitation to the event, was ejected from the venue when he began shouting slogans just prior to Wu's speech. According to the press, PRC officials had canceled several other planned public activities, such as a media session and a visit to a shopping arcade, to avoid potentially embarrassing protests about Ching Cheong, whose appeal to the Beijing courts was rejected on November 24.

Sakaue